

4. “Aurea mediocritas”

The concepts of measure, measurement and moderation in Presocratic philosophy

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Abstract:

An important moral tradition was formed in ancient Greece, starting from the early 6th century BC and extending approximately to the first half of the 5th century BC. This social morality which values virtue above pleasure (ἡδονή) and ordains the observance of measure (μέτρον), namely the morality of prudence (σωφροσύνη), was shaped thanks to the orders of the Oracle of Delphi and the Seven Sages for self-restraint and avoidance of excess, but also thanks to the moral teaching of Presocratic philosophers and the legislation of wise and enlightened legislators, as it seems that the requirement for measure ensures the existence of polis (city) and makes it operating orderly and in a harmonic manner.

The purpose of this article is to show how the requirement for the measure was reflected in the theoretical thinking of Presocratic philosophers. The paper deals with the period, when the concepts of measure, measurement and moderation penetrated into the fields of ethics and political philosophy, fields that still have not acquired a more systematic form as it happens in the era of Plato, Aristotle and their descendants.

Keywords:

Presocratics; measure; measurement; moderation; calculation; virtue; prudence; restraint; pleasure; delight; welfare; nature; knowledge of nature